

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Statement by Ms. Wameedh Shakir
UN Security Council Briefing on Yemen
15 April 2024

Madam President, Excellencies,

My name is Wameedh Shakir, and I am the Chairwoman of Itar Foundation for Social Development, a Yemeni organization dedicated to promoting the rights and participation of women and youth, building peace, and achieving social and gender equality. I stand before you today with a heavy heart, pleading for your urgent attention to the ongoing crisis in Yemen that has unfolded for far too long, devastating countless lives, particularly women, girls, and marginalized groups. My remarks will highlight three areas:

1. The gendered impact of the humanitarian and economic crises,
2. The impacts of climate change, particularly on women and girls, and
3. The role of civil society, including women's rights and women-led organizations, and the importance of their full, equal, and meaningful participation in the peace and political process.

Madam President,

The conflict in Yemen has unleashed a devastating humanitarian crisis, leaving millions teetering on the brink of starvation. 17 million Yemenis are food insecure, with six million on the precipice of famine.¹ Women and children are bearing the brunt of this crisis, making up almost 80% of those in need of humanitarian assistance.² Meanwhile, the currency value has dropped, causing food prices to increase by over 300% (400% for wheat).³ Over half of households cannot afford necessities, with power outages, water scarcity, and unpaid wages further worsening their situation.⁴

Economic collapse disproportionately burdens Yemeni women. Soaring food prices and dwindling resources force them to skip meals or sell belongings. Malnutrition threatens 2.7 million pregnant and breastfeeding women.⁵ Stalled peace talks and ongoing fighting worsen the situation. Excluded from decision-making, women bear the brunt of the conflict yet have no voice in ending it.

Skipping meals, dropping out of school, child marriage, street labor, and begging are just some of the high-risk coping strategies that millions in Yemen have had to resort to. Millions of girls have had to leave their school desks to work to provide food for their families.⁶ Of the 10.7 million school-age children in Yemen, 4.5 million are out of school, 70% of whom are girls, and with displaced children twice as likely to drop out than their peers.⁷

Lack of access to education for girls has implications on rates of forced early child marriage, particularly for displaced girls — about one in five displaced girls aged 10-19 is currently married, significantly higher than the typical rate in the host community.⁸

Urgent funding is crucial to prevent a humanitarian catastrophe. Donors must support local civil society, especially women's rights groups, with long-term funding. This empowers local leaders to reach the most vulnerable.

Madam President,

Climate change adds another layer of devastation to the humanitarian catastrophe. Yemen's vulnerability to climate change translates into food insecurity, water scarcity, and displacement. Erratic rainfall patterns, rising temperatures, and declining groundwater levels threaten food security for millions who rely on agriculture for their livelihoods. A third of Yemen's groundwater and surface water is on the verge of depletion, with wells reaching a depth of over 700 meters.⁹ All this disproportionately affects women and girls, who often play a crucial role in food production and household water collection and management. The fact that women own less than 1% of land further hinders their ability to adapt to climate change and access resources.¹⁰ In 2023, climate change

affected over 300,000 people, mostly IDPs who had fled conflict areas and then lost their shelters, income, and any form of livelihoods.¹¹

Climate change also exacerbates displacement, forcing millions to flee their homes in search of water, food, and safety. 4.5 million Yemenis are internally displaced due to the conflict and natural disasters.¹² Displaced populations, especially women and girls, are more vulnerable to climate change, violence, and disease.

At Itar, we recently worked with 460 internally displaced women, who informed us that sewage overflow, swamps, heavy rainfall, flooding, and industrial pollution, especially from oil companies, are the most frequent issues in their areas.¹³ Communities, especially women, are forced to adopt negative coping mechanisms to survive, such as reducing spending on health needs, being forcibly displaced to safer places, and resorting to borrowing. These women said their three highest aspirations were: shelter, more sustainable services, and lasting peace.

Despite the devastating effects, authorities do not consider climate change a priority. Mitigating the effects of climate change requires long-term development programs, abundant funding, and specialized expertise, all of which are almost entirely absent and impossible to achieve in the shadow of conflict and political fragility.

Although existing climate change adaptation plans recognize the need for civil society and local community participation, they lack gender and youth-responsive implementation mechanisms. It is imperative that policies, strategies, and projects to address climate change reflect the needs, expertise, and aspirations of women and girls.

Madam President,

Women play a critical role in peacebuilding and social cohesion. Yet their voices are missing from the decision-making table. The negotiating parties have a dismal record when it comes to women's inclusion. Alarming, the representation of women is declining at all levels and their participation in the peace process remains negligible.¹⁴ Women were underrepresented in the political entities of the government and political parties, as well as those engaged in the conflict at regional and global levels. Additionally, women's leadership within civil society organizations is low, and they face difficulties in accessing funding and capacity development.

Civil society, especially women's rights and women-led organizations, are the backbone of Yemeni humanitarian, peace, and development efforts. They provide essential humanitarian assistance, advocate for just and inclusive peace, and empower women and youth. However, their space is shrinking, with ongoing conflict, restrictions on movement, and the sharp decline in funding further undermining their crucial contributions.¹⁵ Prioritizing gender equality and local women's leadership in humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding efforts is crucial.

Madam President,

Yemenis desperately need a lasting peace that protects their human rights. Renewed efforts towards peacebuilding are crucial, with civil society and women's rights organizations at the forefront. This can pave the way for a secure future for all Yemenis.

Therefore, I urge the Security Council to:

- Call on all parties to respect and protect the human rights of all Yemenis, including women and girls, in accordance with international law.
- Hold UN Member States to account for upholding principles and rights-based frameworks around Women, Peace and Security and Youth, Peace and Security, contributing to inclusive peace processes that guarantee the full, equal and meaningful participation of all Yemenis, including women and youth, and an enabling environment for civil society so they may participate in peace and security decision-making at all levels.
- Urge donors to fund the humanitarian response plan urgently and fully in Yemen, with direct, flexible and multi-year funding to women's rights and women-led organizations.

- Urge all parties to the conflict to take concrete steps to address the ongoing economic crisis, alleviate poverty, and preserve the dignity of the Yemeni people.
- Urge the parties in Yemen to lift all restrictions on the movement of Yemeni women, and humanitarian and peacebuilding workers. This includes facilitating the work of local and international organizations.
- Urge all parties to the conflict in Yemen to demonstrably address the climate crisis, including by enhancing good governance, building institutional capacity, and empowering civil society participation.

Thank you.

¹ World Food Programme (WFP), “Yemen Situation Report #2,” 4 April 2024, <https://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/wfp-yemen-situation-report-2-february-2024>.

² Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), "Yemen: Humanitarian Response Plan," 1 February 2024, <https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/yemen/yemen-humanitarian-response-plan-hrp-2024-january-2024>.

³ Joint NGO CSO Statement, “Millions still struggling to survive in Yemen, as the cost of food soars 300%, humanitarian actors warn,” 2 October 2023, <https://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/millions-still-struggling-survive-yemen-cost-food-soars-300-humanitarian-actors-warn-enar>.

⁴ World Bank, “Breaking the Cycle of Food Crises in Yemen,” 2 May 2023, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2023/04/27/breaking-the-cycle-of-food-crises-in-yemen>.

WFP, “Yemen Food Security Update,” 29 February 2024, <https://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/wfp-yemen-food-security-update-february-2024>.

⁵ United Nations Population Fund, “Humanitarian Response in Yemen,” 26 March 2024, <https://yemen.unfpa.org/en/publications/unfpa-humanitarian-response-yemen-2024>.

⁶ OCHA, “Yemen Humanitarian Needs Overview,” 1 February 2024, <https://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/yemen-humanitarian-needs-overview-2024-january-2024>.

⁷ Save the Children, “Hanging in the Balance: Yemeni Children’s Struggle for Education,” 25 March 2024, <https://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/hanging-balance-yemeni-childrens-struggle-education>.

⁸ UNICEF, “Child Marriage Country Profile: Yemen,” 1 December 2021, <https://www.unicef.org/media/111411/file/Child-marriage-country-profile-Yemen-2021.pdf>.

⁹ United Nations in Yemen, “Being the Change in Yemen: Improving Integrated Water Resources Management for Food Security,” 23 March 2024, <https://yemen.un.org/en/224345-being-change-yemen-improving-integrated-water-resources-management-food-security>.

¹⁰ Oxfam, CARE and GenCap in Yemen, “From the Ground Up: Gender and Conflict Analysis in Yemen,” 20 October 2016, <https://www.careevaluations.org/wp-content/uploads/rr-yemen-gender-conflict-analysis-201016-en.pdf>.

¹¹ International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, “YEMEN Climate Fact Sheet,” (2023), <https://go.ifrc.org/countries/10/additional-info>.

¹² OCHA, “Yemen Humanitarian Needs Overview.”

¹³ Piloting Displaced Women’s and Girls’ Humanitarian-Peace Dialogue in Yemen Project (2022-2023). Itar Foundation for Social Development, UN Women and Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund.

¹⁴ Oxfam, "Speaking Up: The role of women in building peace in Yemen," 8 March 2023, <https://policy-practice.oxfam.org/resources/speaking-up-the-role-of-women-in-building-peace-in-yemen-621481/>.

Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, "Women’s Voices in Yemen’s Peace Process: Priorities, Recommendations, and Mechanisms for Effective Inclusion," 25 January 2023, <https://sanaacenter.org/publications/main-publications/19400>.

¹⁵ Amnesty International, “Yemen: Southern Transitional Council must end crackdown on civic space,” 5 March 2024, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/03/yemen-southern-transitional-council-must-end-crackdown-on-civic-space/>.